

Stop #6 – Jerome Peirce (Grave #540)

Corporal Jerome Peirce of Orange, Massachusetts, enlisted in the 36th Massachusetts Infantry in August 1862. When the 31-year-old mechanic was shot through the heart on May 12, 1864, at the battle of Spotsylvania Court House, he left behind a 29-year-old widow named Albinia (“Allie”) and a four-year-old daughter named Lucy. A son had died earlier, in childbirth. After her husband’s death, Allie took Lucy and moved back to her parent’s house. She died there in 1929 at the age of 85 and is buried in the family cemetery in Billerica, Massachusetts. Above her grave is a large stone on which Jerome Pierce’s name is inscribed next to those of his wife and two children.

After the war, Allie sent Fredericksburg National Cemetery Superintendent Andrew J. Birdsall a check for 100 dollars. She asked Birdsall to decorate her husband’s grave regularly with flowers, using the money that she had sent him. Birdsall opened an account and Farmers and Merchants Bank and used interest from the account to decorate the grave each Memorial Day. When Birdsall left Fredericksburg, his daughters took over the task.

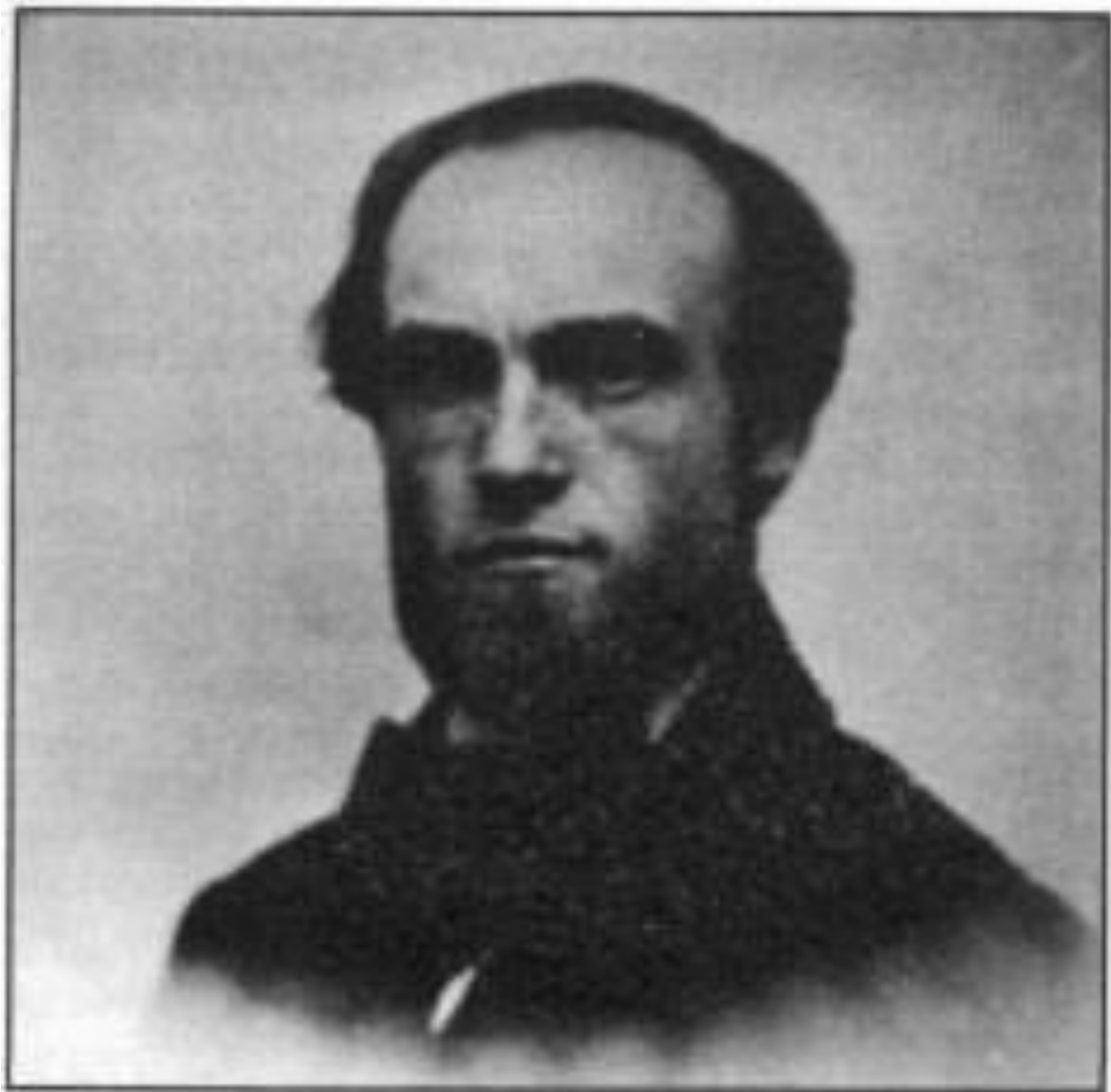
A granddaughter, Mrs. Alice Heflin Abernathy, continued the tradition until her death in the 1990’s. *“He was always just Jerome to us,”* she once told a reporter. *“We never really knew anything about him except that his family sent my grandfather \$100 and asked us to take care of his grave. It was our duty, so that’s what we’ve done.”*

Mrs. Abernathy’s nieces have since taken up the task. Each year around Memorial Day they place flowers at Jerome Pierce’s grave. With the flowers is a note that reads: “Once lost, now found, never forgotten.”

In 2005, the nieces gave the National Park Service \$500 with which to buy flowers for Pierce’s grave once they can no longer do so, thus ensuring perpetuation of this tradition.

The individuals whose stories we have highlighted this evening provide just a narrow glimpse at the sacrifices made by the soldiers buried in this cemetery. Although each has a different story and each died in a different way, they all served and died to preserve the Union. We ask that as you continue to explore the cemetery and as you observe Memorial Day on Monday, you remember the sacrifices made by these soldiers and by American servicemen and women in others wars on behalf of this nation. We have the liberties that we enjoy today because of their sacrifice.

Thank you for joining us this evening. If you would like to exit the cemetery at this point, please proceed down the path, and be mindful of the steps near the entry gate. Otherwise, you are welcome to explore the rest of the cemetery if you wish.



Jerome Peirce



Albinia Peirce



Lucy Peirce, circa 1862



Lucy Peirce



Lucy Peirce



Albinia Peirce